



Socialist Standard

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French Riots
Welfare System
Bauen Hotel
Russia 1905

Monkeys and Leaders
Tory Leadership Contest

French Toast

Capitalism gets its fingers burned

Journal of the Socialist Party—Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



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Demonstrators heading to the Winter Palace, 1905. Page 12



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"It says something about the Tories' panic that they should promote an MP as inexperienced (although practised in cynicism) as Cameron as the man to become prime minister"

Greasy Pole, page 19

The Unemployed Riots in France

Following the death in the last week of October of two teenagers electrocuted while trying to avoid a police identity card check, riots broke out in the suburb of Paris where they lived. These soon spread to other suburbs of Paris and then to those in other cities of France. Police were stoned, cars set alight and fire engines attacked, night after night, for three weeks.

Most of the rioters were the children or grandchildren of workers who had come to work in France from its former colonies in North and West Africa. This led some to see the riots as another aspect of some Islamic attack on "Western civilisation". Predictably, the notorious French racist politician, Jean-Marie Le Pen, said it was all due to immigration.

Actually, in a sense, it was a revolt against "Western civilisation", but not by Islamists. It was a revolt by unemployed youth, living in rundown estates with the worst amenities, against the fate capitalism has imposed on them. Certainly, most of the rioters were nominally Muslims and the children of recent economic migrants, but essentially they were workers who had been thrown on to the scrap heap even before they had had a job.

Insult was added to injury by the French interior minister talking about people on the estates as "riff-raff" and about "cutting out the gangrene" and "cleaning by pressure hose". He maintained he was only referring to drug dealers and petty criminals but this was not how it was perceived on the estates.

Capitalism needs a reserve army of unemployed, to exert a downward pressure on wages as well as a source of readily-available extra labour-power that can be called upon during the expansion phase of the capitalist economic cycle. In addition, there is always a surplus population who, for various reasons, are never going to be employed. The level of state "benefits" paid to these non-working sections of the working class is fixed more by political than economic considerations, basically by



what the state can get away with without provoking riots.

In France the state has evidently pushed a section of these workers too far. The result has been a revolt against the state as represented by the police, the fire brigade and public buildings. The French state has replied in kind. Sending in more police, declaring a state of emergency, imposing curfews, handing down severe sentences including deportation to countries convicted rioters are supposed to

have "come from" but have never been to. Of course, in the end, the state will win and the riots will be put down. After the repression, however, the state will spend a little more money to improve amenities and job prospects on the estates, the price of avoiding further costly and damaging unemployed riots.

But what a comment on capitalist civilisation! In a world which has the potential to provide a decent life for everybody, a section of the population is driven to riot just to get a slightly less small pittance to live on.

Rioting, though perhaps understandable, is not the answer. What is required is not blind rage but that the quite legitimate rage of these victims of capitalism should be accompanied by an understanding of the situation capitalism has put them in. Capitalism causes - in fact, requires - some workers to be surplus to requirements and suffer above average social exclusion. Once this is understood, then it will be realised that the constructive

thing to do is to work for a new society in which having to obtain money, by hook or by crook, to acquire what you need to live will be a thing of the past.

A society based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of life where enough for all will be produced since satisfying people's needs will be the sole aim of production. A society where everyone will be "socially included" because we're all fellow human beings. ■

SUMMIT'S UP

At first there was NAFTA, then there was FTAA - or rather, there wasn't, because talks to establish the Free Trade Area of the Americas have got bogged down in disagreements. The North American Free Trade Agreement, between the US, Canada and Mexico, came into force in 1994. Its declared aims were to eliminate trade barriers between the three countries involved and increase investment opportunities. In fact, it is far more about investment than trade, allowing US and Canadian factories to be moved to cheap-labour areas in Mexico and opening up further chances for privatisation. But it was always seen as a first step only, and the FTAA, which would extend to most of Central and South America and cover 34 countries, is the logical conclusion, originally intended to come into effect at the start of 2005.

The FTAA has many opponents. The nasty right-wing super-nationalists in the John Birch Society (see www.stoptheftaa.org) view it as part of the ongoing abolition of the United States, opening up borders to all sorts of criminals, terrorists and other undesirables, doing away with US sovereignty and creating a European Union-style integrated political unit. This isolationist conception does not fit in with that of the rulers of the US, however. There have also been opponents from the 'left', largely from the anti-globalisation or global justice movement (see www.globalexchange.org/campaigns/ftaa/, for instance). They point to the effects of NAFTA in cutting wages in Mexico and increasing threats to the environment and public health. FTAA, they claim, will just be the same thing, writ larger.

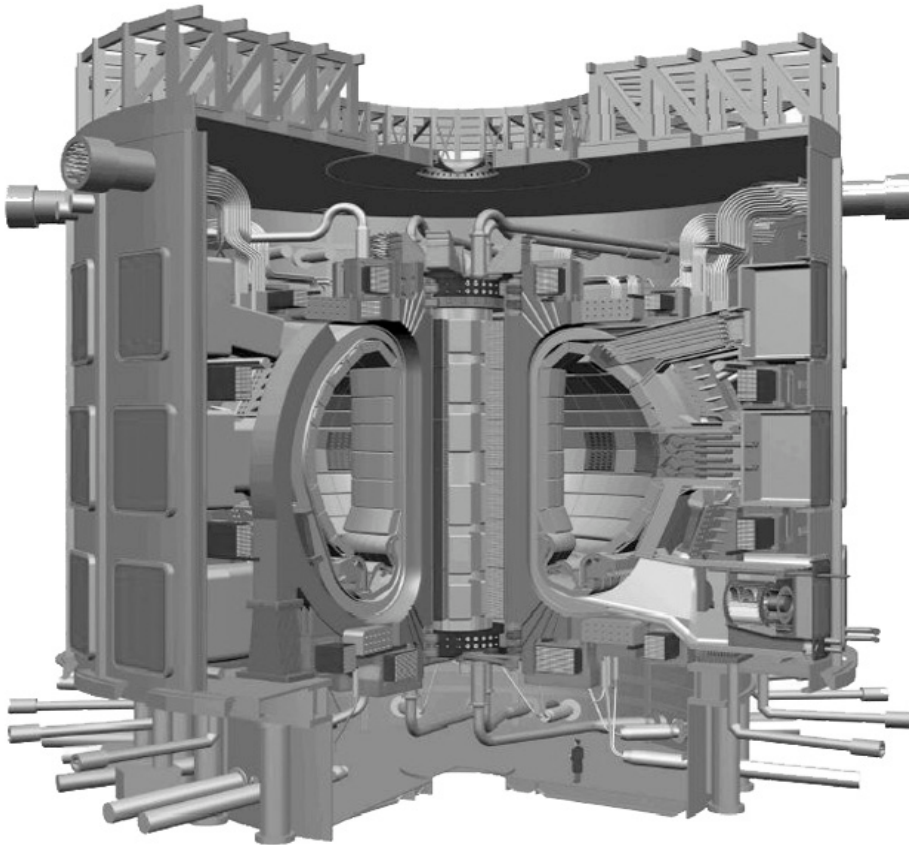
In early November the Summit of the Americas was

held in Argentina, partly to see how FTAA could be put back on track after the rulers of some countries objected to it. In the meantime, smaller groupings have been pushed forward, such as the Central America Free Trade Agreement (due to start in January 2006) and the Andean Free Trade Agreement (which is still under negotiation). The US is also particularly interested in expansion of the Panama Canal, which carries 14% of US foreign trade, so that it can handle more and bigger ships. But the Summit did not give the green light to FTAA, despite Bush's threats and arm-twisting. A handful of countries stood out against it, including Venezuela, where oil resources give the rulers a bit of bargaining freedom (see the November *Socialist Standard*). So now things are being left to the meeting of the World Trade Organization in Hong Kong in the middle of this month.

The Argentinian Summit was marked by protests and police crackdowns, together with the usual populist anti-American pronouncements from Presidents Chavez of Venezuela and Lula of Brazil. Clearly, many workers are unconvinced that a policy is in their interests just because it suits Bush, his fat-cat backers and the American capitalist class in general. But nobody raised the real issues about the way society is run.

The truth is that arguments about 'free trade' or 'fair trade' or any other kind of trade completely miss the point. All variants on trade accept the idea that food, clothing, housing etc. should be bought and sold rather than freely available. They also accept that the earth should belong to a small class of owners rather than being the common property of all its people. They all accept the existence of capitalism rather than rejecting it entirely as Socialists do. ■

Nuclear Con-Fusion



A cut away diagram of ITER

Few situations demonstrate the reactive nature of central government better than the energy question. Faced with a popular tide of opposition to new nuclear build on the one hand, and the utter impossibility of meeting the 40% energy shortfall expected in the next two decades with renewables, it's easy to see why Blair's government is desperate to keep treading the fine wire of non-commitment. When in doubt, do and say nothing, and maybe tomorrow the situation will change.

It wasn't always so. Nuclear fission energy was once the Philosopher's Stone of science that was to herald a brave new world of clean and efficient energy for all time. But the optimism didn't last long, and in the wake of Windscale 1957, the Silkwood affair, and later Three Mile Island and, catastrophically, Chernobyl, the public infatuation with this futuristic technology was well and truly over. Nowadays the questions they should have asked back in the 50's come easily to the lips of the general public - who says it's safe, who says it's cheap, and what about the waste?

But western capitalism is in a bit of a fix, because, quite apart from any fluffy consideration of fossil fuel emissions and the ozone layer, the real issue is that the remaining deposits of oil, coal and gas are largely under the control of Russia and China. Solar, wind and wave energy contribute only a tiny fraction of the national grid and never look likely to manage more than 20 per cent even in the government's wildest fantasies.

Some excitement has been generated recently over the decision to start building the ITER nuclear fusion reactor at Caderache in Southern France, something of a coup for the EU and one in the eye for Japan, who has been arm-wrestling for the right to host this plant for years. Fusion, it ought to be pointed out, has made some progress in recent years. Gone are the days when it consumed vastly more energy than it produced - the new larger reactors have seen to that. And it's remarkably clean and efficient. Instead of burning fossil fuels and releasing their stored electromagnetic energy, you fuse heavy hydrogen isotopes together and

in the process unleash the vastly more powerful force that holds protons and neutrons together - about 10 million times more powerful. Best of all, the main waste product is helium, which is useful for balloons, airships and at staff Xmas parties for giving the managers squeaky voices, but is otherwise a non-toxic, inert element.

So what's the catch? The ITER plant is not even a prototype reactor, it is a pre-prototype, designed to test whether the materials and construction can stand up to the sun-like 100 million degrees centigrade necessary for nuclear fusion to occur. Nobody knows if the material can take it, and until they do, nobody would dare build a real reactor. So we could still be looking at fifty years before fusion is contributing anything to the national grid. So, in the meantime, it could be back to good old filthy fission.

What is, for a socialist, strange to the point of comical in all this, is that in all the energetic debate about the pending energy crisis, when all the ageing reactors are closed down and there's nothing to replace them with, nobody, not one politician, or media pundit, or social commentator, ever suggests that we just take a forty per cent drop in energy consumption and live with it. How can we continue to live the nightmare life of the motorway commuter without petrol? Oh no, we can't possibly give that up, we'll have to use hydrogen. How do we continue to have all our cities' department stores lit up every night like Christmas trees so people can window-shop at 4 am? Dread thought that consumers should have their nocturnal browsing habits constrained, we need to develop fusion technology. How do we keep selling the public more and more energy? Simple, we persuade them to live in 'smart' houses where even the tin-opener discusses Kant.

Capitalism is not, of course, really interested in saving energy. Energy companies could offer customer discounts to those who were frugal, but in fact that's not the way to make money. Some years ago a group called CORE (Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment) demonstrated that it was possible to provide cavity-wall and loft insulation for every house in England and Wales for less than the cost of one nuclear power station, and at a net energy saving greater than that produced by the same nuclear power station. So saving energy is not the point, using as much as possible in as profligate a way as possible is where the money is at, which fact demonstrates, as few situations can do better, the reactive nature of capitalism and the inability of common sense to prevail where the cash incentive is concerned.

Human Nature

Dear Editors,
I'm aware that Socialists often have to face the criticism that Socialism is against human nature. According to this point of view human beings are naturally selfish and acquisitive, even when they have enough to satisfy their own needs. There would certainly seem to be plenty of apparent evidence for that point of view. I thought you



might appreciate a section I came across in "The Neurotic Personality of Our Time" (1937) by Karen Horney (left):

"The irrational quest for possession is so widespread in our culture that it is only by making

comparisons with other cultures that one recognises that it is not a general human instinct, either in the form of an acquisitive instinct or in the form of a sublimation of biologically founded drives. Even in our culture compulsive striving for possession vanishes as soon as the anxieties determining it are diminished or removed."

Horney saw "the irrational quest for possession" as one of a number of ways in which people try to cope with feelings of anxiety, and not as an expression of "human nature".

She rejected over-generalised ideas about "human nature" and recognised how diverse people are in their attitudes and behaviour.

ADAM WATERHOUSE, BRISTOL

Buying Life's Essentials

Dear Editors

The aim of capitalism is to sell. I remember that in the 1939/45 war if we had food, warmth and shelter we wanted nothing, so I try to restrict my buying to essentials.

M. B. A. CHAPMAN, BATH.



Essential: a pre-war corner shop

We're not too sure about this. If it caught on, employers would be able to pay us all less.

Humanism

Dear Editors

Permit me to comment on your book review of *Postmodern Humanism* (November). The British Humanist Association was founded in 1896 and not as stated in 1963. A founding member was Charles Bradlaugh MP and when I ceased to be a member in 1997 there existed links with South Place Ethical Society, Rationalist Press Association and National Secular Society.

I shall not comment on the reviewer's claim "they still seem to be working out what their positive case is beyond promoting a non-religious but still ethical approach to life". But I do assure you that they have taken

an active role in the promotion of a large network of funeral celebrants and likewise for wedding and naming ceremonies. Whether these activities exist with the same momentum today, no doubt the book's author (as a member of the North East Humanists) is better able to judge.

E. HIRSCH, HOCKLEY, ESSEX.

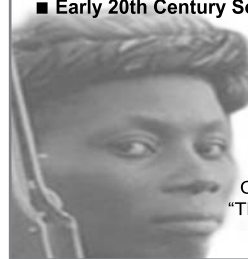
According to the British Humanist Association's own website, they were founded in 1963. It was another body, the Ethical Union, with which they are now associated, that was founded in 1896.

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Merde in France



force is mainly installed in the quiet small towns, the spatial deployment of the flics having stayed largely unchanged since the Vichy epoch. The police trade unions have resisted all attempts at redeployment. As a rule then, the cops only come to thump people they don't know in areas they get lost in.

Calm "middle-class" areas have a plethora of police stations. Earlier experiments with community policing

Wednesday 16 November was a quiet day in France. Only 163 cars were burnt by urban rioters in the whole of France and the state of emergency was lifted in some places and re-imposed in others. The urban unrest of the last two weeks is fading away, leaving some dead - the guy attacked for trying to defend his area from arsonists; some injured - the disabled woman set on fire in a bus by thugs, the 18-month-old baby who received a rock on the head and a whole lot of mindless vandalism: cars burnt, schools burnt, buses burnt, kindergartens burnt, shops smashed and so on.

The death of the two young lads who were accidentally electrocuted when they ran into an electricity sub-station in Clichy-sous-bois north of Paris following an all too routine police identity check in the area was not in itself the trigger to these events. The trigger was the reaction of the Interior Minister, Sarkozy, (France's answer to Blunkett, marital problems included) who called the unruly young people in the suburbs "riff-raff", thus confirming a tendency towards the blanket stigmatization of the population who live there.

The equation suburbs = immigrants = delinquents, is, of course, the kind of brainless reasoning favoured by members of the National Front, and by some police officers, particularly those who "know" the immigrant population largely through their experience of the dirty Algerian war of independence. But the "immigrant" population in the suburbs have been there for three generations and as such they walk around with French identity papers. Unfortunately for them, they have Arab names and/or black faces and thus face discrimination in employment. Their problems are a concentration of those faced by French workers as a whole and have nothing to do with their level of

"integration" into the French nation. After all, those Arabs who fought for the French during the Algerian war of independence (the so called "harkis") have themselves vegetated in ghettos, the victims of post-colonial benign neglect. Even these Arabs haven't been allowed to integrate.

Can of worms

The background to this can of worms is not the state of the housing in the sink estates ("cités") in the suburbs of the major towns in France. Some of the housing, admittedly not all, is of fairly good quality having been built in the mid-1970s. British sink estates are a lot worse. Nor is the problem that of the absence of public services, education, health care, public transport and all the rest. These public services are present in these areas to an extent which could only be dreamt of in an equivalent American or British ghetto. Let's not get things mixed up. No, the main problem of these sink estates is precisely the social and ethnic homogeneity of these areas or the concentration of people with profound social problems there. Family breakdown, sole parenting, low self-esteem, educational difficulties, problems of employment co-exist with an often violent social environment where young people grow up surrounded by delinquent gangs.

To make matters worse, the French police

("police de proximité") undertaken by the "socialist government" of Jospin succeeded in calming the suburbs but were abandoned by the super-cop Sarko on the ground that this allowed the proliferation of a parallel drug economy (true). In these terms, the more testosterone-propelled policing of the current administration is believed to be more effective (not true). As a result policing in the suburbs has taken on the "wham bang and thank you mam" style with lots of media attention.

Funds going to the associations in the suburbs have been cut and job-creation schemes suspended. This is guaranteed to worsen community relations with little payoff in terms of the fight against thugs whose activities do, after all, provide some cash-flow in these areas where youth unemployment often hits 45 percent - the highest rate in Europe. No wonder then that the government has decided to park the riot police (CRS) on a semi-permanent basis in these estates. Although country bumpkins with a well-deserved reputation for brutality, they do at least know how to react



when they get lost in an area they don't know.

"Arab work"

In strictly capitalist terms nothing can nor perhaps will be done to change this sorry state of affairs. The current population of the suburbs largely consists of the sons and daughters of black Africans and Arabs brought over in the 1960s and 1970s to do the shit jobs in the factories that the French didn't want to do. (A reality which was brought home to me when I saw an entire train full of exhausted workers returning from a night shift at the Peugeot works in Poissy. They were all Arabs.) Whilst this earlier generation now subsists on microscopic pensions and social benefits, the new kids on the block are showing a distinct tendency towards underemployment and delinquency. When mass unemployment hit these areas in the 1980s what complacent sociology calls the "visible immigrants" found themselves trapped and underemployed in the suburbs as the earlier ("invisible"?) immigrants of Spanish, Italian, Polish or Portuguese origin had succeeded in getting the hell out. Integration after all is not so much a question of religion as it is a question of timing.

Then came the trendy do-gooders who



this outfit provides a convenient bogey-man for lefties who have got lost in the banality of left/right capitalist politics. The party, generously staffed by disaffected former colonists from Algeria (the so-called "pieds noirs"), has heavily underlined the failure of integration of the French citizens of Arab origin many of whom, incredibly, still don't know how to conjugate the subjunctive of the imperfect in French and this after so many grammar lessons. The party even has a radio station called, curiously, "Radio Courtoisie" (Right wing French thugs have always had impeccable manners) to beam out its Christian message of hatred and prejudice. Fortunately, only bored housewives and retired colonels listen to this drivel.

Ordinary French workers have proved over and over again that they are not on the whole racist bigots, though they can be a bit xenophobic. Nonetheless the party continues to garner votes in constituencies where it doesn't even have a local branch or even any kind of grass-roots



in the mid-1980s launched the windy humanistic movement "Touche pas à mon pote" ("don't touch my mate") with the help of heavy public subsidies from the Mitterrand government, "the Sphinx" having abandoned all pretence to defend working class interests sometime early in the 1980s. Ostensibly a worthy movement aimed at overcoming the problems faced by those French citizens who were unfortunate enough to have Arab or black parents, this current of thought succeeding in convincing gullible people that the real problem faced by people in the sink estates was the entrenched racism of the French and not simply shit jobs, unemployment and a brutal and ignorant police force: problems faced by workers everywhere.

Vomitorium

The other side of the political rainbow has seen the development of a far-right extremist party, the National Front, from out of the moribund Poujadist organisation of the 1950s. Led by Jean Marie Le Pen, an ex-paratrooper involved in dirty business during the Algerian war of independence,

existence. For the party exists in fact, as a convenient way for workers to express their disaffection with the French political establishment which is all too clearly in cahoots with capitalist interests. It's a kind of gigantic publicly-subsidized vomitorium into which people spew their bile with Le Pen's ugly mug providing a convenient emetic. In doing this, however, French workers have clearly been playing with fire. Now they're getting burnt.

Urban pariahs

Thus doubly confirmed in their status as urban pariahs, many of the young people in the suburbs have continued to study quietly and find work despite an ill-adapted educational system, material difficulties, postcode discrimination, the useless condescension of the politicians and crap jobs. The educational priority areas ("zone éducation prioritaire"), modelled on the earlier British fiasco, have been starved of resources and have thus done little to erode the inequalities of an overtly elitist educational system. They receive a piddling 8 percent more than the mainstream

schools, hardly enough to compensate for the learning difficulties encountered by people from poor backgrounds, not to mention those from non-French speaking backgrounds in a country where national arrogance places on premium on speaking proper.

Despite the difficulties there are some fine, dedicated teachers in these areas whose efforts have been hampered by a sordid social environment and poor logistic support. In the final analysis then, 62 percent of French working-class

people find their offspring back in the working-class background which they came from (the highest proportion in Europe) in a country which presents itself as secular and meritocratic. And that's before we put the peculiar problems faced by the denizens of the ghetto into the balance.

So the real problem is the inability of people in these areas to escape from a highly stigmatizing spatial set-up. The association suburb = immigrants = delinquency is criminal stupidity. The Arab and black populations who live in areas in close proximity to mainstream French life do not riot. Nor did the Arabs who live in the centre of Marseilles. (In the same way quiet Alsatian villages with no Arabs vote National Front.) Where the sink estates did not riot is more important than where they did but no television cameras go to these areas. In fact, the vast majority of the third generation immigrants in the suburbs took no part in the disorders and many were as terrified by what went on as the French population in general.

The problem should not be thought of simply in terms of spatially delimited sink estates. The wider trends of the whole of French society should be taken into account. To a significant extent, the troubles should be seen as a reflection of the growing geographical segregation of the French population partly due to the booming housing market and the continuous rise in rents in the private sector.

And the doings of the affluent in France should also be mentioned. The rich are beginning to privatize the French republic for their own ends. Rich ghettos, like Sarko's own constituency of Neuilly to the west of Paris has only 2 percent of council housing when the legal obligation is for 20 percent. The same is true of neighbouring Levallois and the pattern is repeated all over France. Clearly the rich are having some difficulty integrating into the Republic, perhaps they don't want to. After all, they send their kids to private, often catholic schools, where they learn how different they are from everyone else. Thereafter they take advantage of higher education facilities to propel their horrendous offspring into the better jobs. A short sojourn in the States completes the picture.

More importantly, recent events have allowed the government to sneak through controversial tax breaks for the super-rich whilst introducing more tax free enterprises into the sink estates - but then again, perhaps, this was what was really at stake in the first place. ■

MM (Paris)

Report from Paris

We have received the following report on the recent riots in France as seen by a migrant worker there.

At the end of October there was a heavy riot in the suburbs of Paris as a result of a police identity card control. Three African immigrants, one from the west coast and the other two from North Africa were controlled by police around Seine Saint Denis in one of suburbs of Paris. There was a disagreement between the immigrants and the police on duty. So, the three immigrants raced for safety but, unfortunately, two ran into a high tension compound and were electrocuted. Another one ran in a different direction and alerted his friends to what happened. Before they could trace the two boys and call the fire service to rescue them, it was too late.

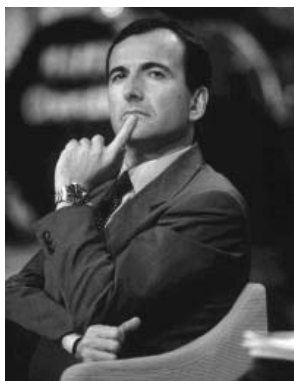
These suburbs have been neglected, segregated for people of the same ethnic and religious background, for the past thirty years. Some of those living there who acquired good skills in one trade or the other were denied a job opportunity because of their colour, location of their residence or Islamic names. An English adage says that an idle man is the devil's workshop. Since these immigrants were denied social and economic integration into French society, they devised what means of livelihood they could in order to keep the body and soul together. For many years French society has regarded them as outcasts and vagabonds who have no value just because of their colour and fate.

When this incident happened the Interior Minister of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, a hardliner and the son of an Hungarian immigrant, supported the action of the police and said that they were on a drive to control criminals and drugs in those suburbs instead of showing compassion and regret over the death of the two African immigrants. After his television broadcast, these immigrants, comprising black Africans and the North Africans, plus their sympathetic friends from Asia, Latinos, West Indies and other Europeans, joined hands in the riots.

On the second day of the riots, the Interior Minister bragged that he would beef up the police to one thousand to control the situation. And that night about eight hundred cars were burnt excluding houses. The riots started from Seine Saint Denis around Paris and spread all over France. These cities are Bordeaux, Nantes, Toulouse, Tours, Belfort, Essonne, Roubaix, Strasbourg, Lyon, Vaucluse, Besancon, Aulnay, Marseille, Amiens, and many more cities in France.

The cost of the damage in the three weeks of riots in France amounted to €200 million, just because of racism, xenophobia, and segregation that was imposed on immigrants by capitalism. And this is the country that propagated a disguised colonisation to third world countries under the pretence of a policy of association and assimilation. And today their fake paradigm programme is exposed to the world for us to know the danger in capitalism.

On 11 November, BBC radio reported that the European Union Justice Commissioner, Franco Frattini, told France to integrate its ethnic minorities in order to avoid further such occurrences. On 13 November, the same EU gave €50 million to France to rebuild their country. They had forgotten to pass the message across to other EU member states that prevention is better than cure.



Franco Frattini - more integration



To my greatest surprise, on the streets of Paris and other cities that I visited in France many French people confessed in front of the television cameras that they had never seen riots like this in their life. And these were just riots with petrol bombs and stones thrown by few boys! And I asked myself, what if they had seen the genocides from Biafra to Rwanda that imperialism caused, because of its egocentric intent, at the expense of poor Africans in particular and the third world countries at large.

What is happening in France today should be a lesson to nations like Belgium, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

As a socialist propagandist, I hate vandalism, I believe in peaceful social and political dialogue. But, when people take the law into their hands, that means that they have been oppressed beyond bounds and they are prone to explode. And their explosion can result to rioting, rebellion, terrorism and sometimes total anarchy.

At this juncture, EU should use its tongue to count its teeth and know that the Fortress Europe has brought severe damage to France

and that many more riots are on the way to other EU member states that have refused to open up their immigration policy that encourages marginalised 'illegal' immigrants. Immigration policy in the West is based on corrupt western politicians conniving with the third world politicians; as a result, immigrants continue to cross borders and seas no matter what the risk ahead.

Sarkozy is a man who believes that he can become the President of France in 2007 by fighting immigration. Capitalism has blindfolded the world that our level of forgetting things is quite enormous. If not, how can some political riff-raff like Nicolas Sarkozy of France and the Belgium Interior Minister Patrick Dewael be propagating what their forefathers could not achieve years ago? These two sycophants are looking for cheap popularity in their political party because they live in the land of the blind that have eyes but cannot see. They will bring woes to the entire population of these two nations.

Lastly, I am advocating that the only solution that will enable people of different race to live in peace is socialism. And capitalism should be eradicated without further delay to enable us to enjoy the beautiful things of the world without fear. ■

Dele C. Iloanya, Paris



Sarkozy - after cheap popularity

The workfare state: enforcing the wages system

The changes which have taken place in what passes for welfare provision in Britain over the course of the last two decades were analysed in a book by Chris Grover and John Stewart, *The Work Connection: The Role of Social Security in British Economic Regulation*, that came out in 2002. Largely inspired by Marxist economics, it represented a lucid account of a domain where the harsh economic realities of capitalist exploitation contradict the illusions of reformist politics.

In many ways these illusions were fed by the extraordinary ideological success of the post-war Beveridge reforms, frequently presented as the triumph of half a century of reformist action led by Liberal, Labour and - to a lesser extent - Tory administrations. Any remaining illusions are now being dissipated. What welfare coverage and rights existed in the immediate post-war period are now being whittled away or simply done away with in order to more closely serve the form of capital accumulation which is now on the agenda. This new 'inevitability of gradualism' - to use the term adopted by the



Pauline and her pens - from a classic TV satire on the state's relentless humiliation of the unemployed

Webbs - means more exploitation and fewer rights of access to the means of subsistence for anyone unfortunate enough to have to try to find work for a living.

There never was a golden age of the welfare state. The history of income maintenance in Britain has been the history of coercion, discipline and surveillance. As the first functioning capitalist country, England experienced the workhouse test, 'less eligibility' and the doctrine of 'deterrent'. It's still one of the most miserly and punitive 'welfare systems' in Western Europe, although the other European countries are now catching up. (New rules in France mean that workers on the dole have fewer rights to refuse poorly paid jobs, the same is happening in Germany and Spanish workers are forced to be more mobile in the search for work. Whether the government is right or left changes nothing.)

However, now a new layer of social control has been added since the advent of British 'workfare', a policy loosely based on American precedents. In the past, maintaining labour discipline was a fairly simple task. Unemployment insurance benefits tended to be low compared to average wage rates. In a buoyant job market, the only workers who wanted to stay on the dole for a long period were the genial layabouts of the claimants' unions, people who were using benefits to finance studies on the sly, actors 'resting' between roles and artists etc. In this situation, it was relatively easy to identify workers who were dodging work although, in practice, control procedures against the so-called 'scroungers' were not applied systematically. Nobody really had an interest in staying on the dole for too long but some did, much to the horror of Daily Mail readers.

The situation has now changed considerably. Successive governments have been trying to lower the wage levels of unskilled and semi-skilled workers (so-called 'entry-level' jobs) putatively in order to combat inflation. American ideas about the so-called 'underclass' popularised in the highly toxic pseudo-sociology of Charles Murray have replaced the episodic scrounger-bashing campaigns orchestrated by the Tories in the 1970s and 80s. Thus, whereas in the past the unemployed (now known as 'jobseekers') could refuse offers of work which didn't correspond to their levels of skill or even standard trade union rates, now they are hassled into poorly paid jobs as quickly as their legs can carry them. This, in itself, has a particularly depressing effect on wage levels especially in the more lowly-paid occupations.

To make this process go even faster both Conservative and Labour administrations have introduced benefits to workers in low-paid jobs (in-work benefits) modelled on the Family Income Supplement set up in 1971 by the appalling Keith (later Sir Keith) Joseph, a Thatcherite bovver-boy and closet eugenicist. Officially, in-work benefits provide incentives to unemployed people - pardon, 'jobseekers' - to take on poorly paid jobs and to leave the



supposedly luxurious world of inactive welfare dependency. In actual fact, subsidies to low paid jobs tend to have a depressive effect on wages. Employers know that they can get the labour power they need for less cash, the state stepping in to make up the difference. And of course, the increase in the number of workers coming onto the labour market increases supply and lowers price.

All this continues unabated under New Labour, indeed, with many subtle and often cruel refinements. These include the fine combing of the population of the partially disabled and their gradual inclusion in the reserve army of labour and the particularly brutal treatment meted out to lone mothers. Of course, New Labour has introduced the national minimum wage albeit on an extremely low level. But this only means that over the long-term the depressive forces working on wage levels will result in the legal minimum becoming the maximum paid out for unskilled work, the trade unions having been weakened by two decades of legal meddling.

In the final analysis, welfare administration is really only the problem of



policing the frontier between the reserve army of labour - people who are on hold for later exploitation - and the surplus population - people who are simply maintained at low cost outside of the labour market. 'Labour market activation' - the trendy term for these new policies - is really about making some formerly excluded workers available for a spot of exploitation. Social welfare policies don't solve the underlying problem of capitalist exploitation. But then again who would ever look to the Labour Party or New Labour to solve that problem? ■
MM

In November anti-capitalists were urged, via email, to send a letter of protest to the President of Argentina about the threat to evict the workers cooperative, set up by former employees, that took over the bankrupt Bauen Hotel in the centre of Buenos Aires two years ago and has been

running it ever since.

When in December 2001 the Argentine economy and currency began a melt-down many small and medium-sized enterprises went bankrupt or were simply abandoned by their owners. Faced with joining the already huge and growing army of unemployed,

workers in some of these businesses took matters into their own hands. They occupied the workplace and resumed production on their own account.

At the time some saw this as the beginning of a social revolution in which the workers take over the factories and organise production without the bosses. A more sober assessment was that this was workers, in a crisis situation, reacting in a pragmatic fashion to try to ensure that they had some source of income to maintain themselves and their families. But it did at least show, to any who might not have realised it, that workers can organise production without bosses.

This was not really a mass movement, but it currently involves some 200 enterprises employing in total a maximum of 10,000 people, i.e. the average "recuperated enterprise" as they call themselves (recuperated, that is, from bosses regarded as undeserving or even thieving) is one employing about 50 workers. And 10,000 less unemployed is a drop in the ocean compared with the total number of unemployed in Argentina which, even today, is still over 2 million.

The authorities, not wishing to aggravate an already disastrous economic and financial crisis, accepted this situation as a fait accompli and passed a law allowing workers cooperatives to play a part in rescuing failed businesses. Under this law, local and regional authorities were empowered to compulsorily acquire a failed business and authorise it to be run by a workers cooperative for up to two years pending a settlement with other creditors (the workers themselves were often also creditors in respect of unpaid wages) or the former owners. Some recuperated enterprises went down this road. Others negotiated a lease with the former owners, which of course involved paying them a share of any profits. Others continued to operate outside the law.

The two years are now coming up, and with the Argentine economy having recovered a little and the social and political situation stabilised, the authorities are beginning to enforce the law, which gives property rights over a business either to the former owners or their creditors. A number of businesses taken over by the

workers in 2002 have already been recuperated back from them. Now, it appears, it is the turn of the Bauen Hotel.

Evicting the bosses and organising production without them is one thing; escaping from the economic laws of the market is another - as, within capitalism, it is not just a question of organising production, but also of selling what is produced. Because of their precarious legal position, the workers cooperatives running a recuperated enterprise have been at a competitive disadvantage. They can't get proper bank loans and, because ordinary capitalist businesses are not too keen to deal with them, often have to sell to them via a go-between (who naturally demands a share of the profits).

What the workers cooperatives, some of which are organised in a Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas, are now demanding is a stable legal framework; basically, that the state or regional or local authorities compulsorily purchase the business they are running and legally hand it over to them. Thus, the petition to the President of Argentina on behalf of the Bauen Hotel cooperative calls upon "the Argentinian government and its legislators to act immediately to . . . pass a law of definitive expropriation in favour of the Workplace cooperative B.A.U.E.N."

Apart from wanting to secure their own position, the broader vision of those behind the Bauen cooperative seems to be an economy based on a network of worker-owned businesses. Even anarchists in Argentina, who might be expected to look favourably on this, have criticised it:

"Cooperativism does not provide a real solution to the workers' situation. It is incapable of providing an answer in the interests of all workers. At no time does it question the capitalist production relationships - it questions only superficial features (monopolies, competition, etc.). Even less can a network of cooperatives create a parallel subsystem to capitalism" (www.zabalaza.net/phorum/read.php?f=2&i=156&t=156).

Yes, cooperatives can only ever involve a minority of workers, and the more they are integrated into the capitalist economy and its profit-seeking, the more their



Members of the workers cooperative, with the Bauen hotel behind

Argentina's Worker-Run Factories: What Next?

members will have to discipline and pressurise themselves in the way the old bosses did - what used to be known as "self-managed exploitation".

The Trotskyists have another solution. According to an article in the October Le Monde Diplomatique:

"During 2002 there was a lively debate on whether revived businesses should get involved in capitalist markets. A Trotskyist minority called for nationalisation under worker control. It took over four businesses, including Brukman, a garment factory in Buenos Aires, and Zenon, a tile manufacturer in Neuquén. The workers involved saw the rescue as a first step towards a socialist system in which the state would control economic planning. The hard-left parties associated with them did not believe that cooperatives could survive in a capitalist market" (mondediplo.com/2005/10/13survey).

It is certainly true that cooperatives will never be able to outcompete ordinary capitalist enterprises, but the Trotskyists' alternative of the state subsidising the recuperated enterprises, without requiring them to compete in the marketplace, just to provide jobs is even more unrealistic - and has nothing to do with socialism. (It is more than likely, however, that this is just another of the Trotskyists' dishonest "transitional demands" which they know can't be achieved under capitalism but offered as bait to obtain a following for their vanguard party.)

The fact is that there is no way out for workers within the capitalist system. Not cooperatives, not reforms, not trade unions. At most these can only make their situation a little less unbearable. As long as capitalism lasts workers will have to find a source of money one way or another

and so will always be in a dependent and precarious position.

But a number of lessons can be drawn from the recuperated enterprises movement in Argentina.

Firstly, that built into capitalism is a class struggle between those who own the means of wealth production and those who don't and who are therefore forced by economic necessity to sell their ability to work to those who do. This class struggle is not just over the price and conditions of sale of the commodity workers are selling. Ultimately, it's about control over the means of production.

If, as happened in Argentina after the economic melt-down of December 2001, capitalists abandon their factories or, as happened in Russia in 1917, Spain in

“cooperatives will never be able to outcompete ordinary capitalist enterprises“

1936, and Hungary in 1956, the capitalist state is temporarily incapable of protecting capitalist property, then the workers more or less spontaneously take over their workplaces and keep production going. Workers are not going to let themselves starve: if the means of production are there, and there's no state to stop them using them, they'll go ahead and use them, even if they have no revolutionary pretensions. However, as soon as the state has got its act together again, then it is in a position to confront the workers and re-

impose access to the means of production only on its terms.

Which leads to the second lesson: the importance of who controls the state. At the moment, in Argentina as elsewhere, this is in the hands of people favourable to the continuation of capitalism, itself a reflection of the fact that most workers too don't see any alternative to capitalism. The state, therefore, upholds legal private property rights. The importance of political power is in fact fully recognised by the recuperated enterprises movement. This is why they are calling for the law on property rights to be changed so as to recognise the property rights of the workers cooperatives which are running recuperated enterprises; which will only happen if they can get the elected law-makers to do so, either by pressuring them from outside or by electing ones favourable to a change in the law. This is why, too, they want people to petition the President of Argentina.

The end of capitalism can only come as a result of a consciously socialist political movement winning control of political power with a view to abolishing all capitalist property rights and ushering in the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production. The preconditions for ending capitalism are a majority socialist consciousness and workers democratically self-organised in a large-scale socialist party. Neither of which, unfortunately, existed in Argentina. Which is why the recuperated enterprises movement there has proved a dead-end and why the workers cooperatives it gave rise to are now forced to compromise and integrate themselves into capitalism to survive. ■

ADAM BUICK

Cooking the Books (1)

Pensioned Off

According to the government and the capitalist media, there is a "pensions crisis" in that, given the growing proportion of retired people in the population,

the capitalist class is not going to be able to afford to maintain pensioners at the same level as existing ones. Therefore, the argument goes, people must set aside more of their current income to purchase future pension rights. And they must retire later.

It seems to make sense. If there are more retired people compared to those at work, surely that must mean that those at work have to work more and/or consume less? This would be true but for one thing: it ignores the point that over time productivity increases, even if only fairly slowly. This means that more wealth can be produced by a workforce of the same size, out of which, in theory, both current wages and future pensions can be maintained at the same level as today.

"In theory" because the fact that this could happen is no guarantee that it will. But it does show that the capitalist class can't plead poverty here. They can afford to

maintain pensions at current levels.

That this is so was confirmed in a report, The Ageing Population, Pensions and Wealth Creation, released on 31 October by a pro-business think-tank, Tomorrow's Company. According to the BBC News of that day:

"One of the report's authors Philip Sadler said there was no 'ageing crisis'. 'As a society we can afford to grow old,' he said. 'Rising productivity will outweigh any negative influence on living standards from an ageing population.'"

The report asked "how can a working population that is expected to remain around 27 to 28 million create sufficient wealth over the next 35 years to support an additional five million pensioners?" and answers:

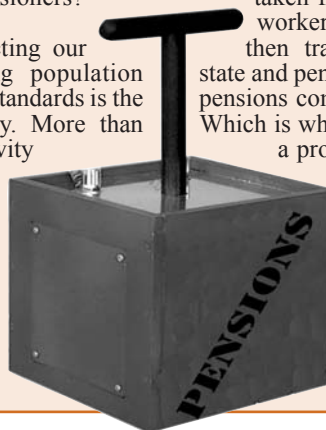
"The main factor affecting our ability to afford an ageing population without the erosion of living standards is the impact of rising productivity. More than anything else, rising productivity explains the paradox that ageing societies have simultaneously become wealthier. At a mere 1.75 per cent productivity growth per year, by 2045, an average British worker will be about twice as productive as today. In other words, a doubling of

new value and resources being produced while the number and share of over 64s grows by less than 50 per cent."

What is interesting in a report from a pro-business lobby is that it acknowledges that it is the "working population" who are the "wealth creators" rather than the usual guff we get from such groups about entrepreneurs being wealth creators. Wealth can only be created by human beings applying their mental and physical energies to materials that originally came from nature.

But they do write as if there was a direct transfer from the "working population" to the pensioners. In fact, this only happens indirectly, as the wealth is taken from its direct producers, the workers, by the capitalist class and then transferred by them, via the state and pension funds, to pensioners. So pensions come out of profits, not wages. Which is why how to pay for pensions is a problem for the capitalist class.

However they solve it, what we get will never be enough to compensate for a lifetime of exploitation.



One hundred years ago this year there happened a series of events in Russia, culminating in a general uprising in December, that Trotsky called 'the dress rehearsal for the revolution of 1917' and which in terms of bloodshed were far more violent than the actual events in St. Petersburg twelve years later.

1905: the first Russian Revolution

Russia at the time was a predominantly agrarian country. 80 per cent of its inhabitants were peasants, eking out a very meagre existence from the soil. They had been emancipated from being serfs in 1861 by a decree of Tsar Alexander III but peasant understanding of personal ownership in land remained very rudimentary. After the 1861 emancipation act there arose a widespread and deeply held belief among the peasants that at some time in the future a redistribution of land was going to happen. This belief made them a very volatile and potentially revolutionary class, although they had no political aims and could see no further than land.

Whereas in Britain and most of Europe at the time, a strong nobility had limited the power of the monarch, allowing a rising capitalist class to develop. In Russia, Tsar Nicholas had absolute power. He ruled under a system called patrimonialism, in which everything belonged to the Tsar. He was absolute monarch and nothing could change without his consent. There was no parliament or constitution. Government officials were directly responsible to him, and he believed firmly in upholding this system, much as Charles I of England believed firmly in the divine right of Kings. This meant in practice that the growth of capitalist industry in Russia was limited and largely reliant on foreign capital. Consequently the indigenous capitalist class was very weak.

As a result of this weakness the path to a political and legal set-up in which capitalist development could flourish was undertaken by the 'intelligentsia', a concept peculiar to Russia. Comprised largely of university students, lawyers, and artists (i.e. writers) it was more or less open to anyone who was against the patrimonial set-up. And because Tsar Nicholas was extremely rigid in his outlook and frightened of any change that could limit his power, democratic protest from the 1870s onwards was not an option. Protest became channelled into the form of violence, with assassinations of government officials taking a prominent part. A movement, openly committed to assassination, called the People's Will came into being, attracting the support of much of the intelligentsia, including, for a time, Lenin. Some thousands of

government officials were killed; assassination became a way of life.

The response from the government, backed by the Tsar, was repression, to clamp down ever more tightly. The use of whips by the police to quell student strikes did not endear the government to those who wanted change. At the close of the 19th century with the setting-up of the Okhrana, Russia became the first police state in history. It was riddled with secret police infiltrating agents into most of the anti-Tsar organisations. Various political parties had developed by this time, with varying aims, ranging from the establishment of a parliament and a constitution to establishing socialism. The exact nature of what they meant by socialism was never really stated, but probably boiled down to some kind of nationalisation, with tight government control. Around this time many of Marx's early writings had arrived in Russia and Marx was very popular, but not much understood. Funnily enough *Capital* was allowed by the censor who thought it was so dreary no one would read it, but mostly Marx's writings were smuggled in.

By 1905 there were three major political parties loosely representing different class interests. They were the Democratic Constitutional Party (Kadets) (bourgeois), Social Democratic Labour Party (working class or proletariat in the language of the day), and Socialist Revolutionaries (roughly, peasants and workers).

Tactics varied from assassination, advocating strike action, to 'leading the workers to the dictatorship of the proletariat' but all were agreed on the necessity to remove the Tsar. From the 1890s onwards things were growing tense. Conditions of work in the factories and railways were abysmal, with very low wages, working hours of twelve to fourteen hours a day and appalling living conditions, much like they had been a few years earlier in Britain's industrial revolution. There were many very large factories in Russia employing up to six thousand workers, attracting thousands of unskilled peasants. They were mainly housed in rapidly built barracks crammed in four or five to one room, quite a few of those employing a night shift saving on bed linen by having the night and day shifts use the same bed.

A meeting of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Lenin is centre, Martov second from right





From left: Martov; Palace Guards preparing to fire at protestors; Stolypin

As usual, as a result of hasty building to accommodate large numbers of workers sanitary conditions were practically non-existent with open sewers in St Petersburg and Moscow and the consequent health risk, the usual concomitants of capitalism in its early stages.

In 1903 the Social Democratic Labour Party held a conference in London to draw up fresh rules (largely to contain the split in their ranks between those following Lenin and those supporting Martov). Lenin was insistent on the need for a tightly integrated, disciplined party of professional revolutionaries. Martov was in favour of a more open, less disciplined party with much easier access to membership. The conference led to a decisive split, roughly down the middle but with a slight edge to Lenin. From that time on these two sections were known by the name of Bolsheviks (majority) and Mensheviks (minority), leading to open conflict between these groups, played out fifteen years later at the time of the deposition of the Tsar and the Bolshevik rise to power.

So, at the turn of the century there existed a highly critical situation. An all powerful and inflexible, but nevertheless weak, Tsar, a poorly organised and ill-developed native capitalist class, a peasantry in rebellious mood but non-politicised, and a small as yet unorganised working class, not political, whose aims were confined to improving working conditions. On the fringe a party of professional revolutionaries whose aim was to lead the proletariat as their 'vanguard', but as yet had minimal influence. Something had to give! In 1905 it did.

In 1904 Russia went to war against Japan, in a war that was partly territorial, and partly, as most Western historians seem agreed, a bid by the Russian government to distract attention from current difficulties and unite the population in a patriotic fervour with a resounding victory. Unfortunately for the Tsar it didn't work, as there was an even more resounding defeat. The general public lack of support for the Tsar fell even lower. More large-scale strikes ensued, and then, in 1905, there happened an event only too common in the struggles of the working class to gain justice.

Trade unions had been disallowed up

till then in Russia but the government had been experimenting with police-led unions in an attempt to take the heat out of workers discontent. One of these was a union led by a priest, Father Gapon. Father Gapon thought it a worthy idea to lead a march in St. Petersburg to appeal to the Tsar, following the commonly-held belief in countries with a very powerful head that their father figure is unaware of the sufferings of the population and will intervene to put them right if only they can bring their problems to his attention. On Sunday 22 January some 150,000 people gathered in St Petersburg and marched on the Winter Palace where it was believed the Tsar was in residence. It was a peaceful protest, many were carrying icons, none were carrying weapons; they believed the Tsar would listen. They were

“any worthwhile progress in human society must come, and can only come, from the working class”

met by troops who opened fire. The death toll was estimated at 200 killed and 800 wounded, reminiscent of many other panic reactions by governing bodies to peaceful working class demonstrations, Peterloo, Tiananmen Square among them. Support for the Tsar fell even further from then on.

Bloody Sunday, as it was thereafter called, opened the floodgates and the country was in turmoil. Strikes, demonstrations, outbreaks of violence were the order of the day. Eventually it was reluctantly agreed to inaugurate a constituent assembly called the 'Duma'. This was set up and delegates were voted in, many of them peasants, but it never had any real power. In the mind of the Tsar it was only a sop which he intended to revoke as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

The conservative reaction to this concession was extreme. A party was set up, the Octobrist party, which encouraged

mob violence against supporters of the Duma. Government-inspired pogroms against Jews resulted in thousands of deaths and much homelessness. A wave of strikes broke out, peasant violence against their landlords escalated, similar to the French peasant violence and destruction of chateaux in another bourgeois revolution. The country was approaching a civil war. The appointment of a new minister of the interior, Stolypin, brought some ease to the country. His reign of repression consisted of setting special courts, which would have no compunction about passing the death sentence. So many were hanged that the nickname 'Stolypin's neckties' became popular. He was eventually assassinated - at the opera, in front of the Tsar.

On the positive side, Stolypin initiated land reforms that were meant to be progressive but are generally agreed as having no great effect. The country gradually settled down, though never completely, and from around 1908 to 1914 there was a mild boom, with an increase in capital development.

Was 1905 a revolution? Not really. It was more a revolt, by large sections of the population against savagely repressive conditions, and by the nascent capitalist class to establish the freedom to operate. But there was no proposal to change the basis of society and each element, the peasants, the bourgeoisie, the nobles were paddling their own canoe. There was only one way they could go: capitalism. At best it was a rebellion, but one that had a profound influence on a similar uprising twelve years later which did change the basis of Russian society by completely uprooting Tsarism.

There are many lessons to be learned from this one episode in a period of violent change. One is that any worthwhile progress in human society must come, and can only come, from the working class. Relying on our rulers to initiate worthwhile change is as useless as the Russian peasants' reliance on the Tsar. But above all is the fact that no force can cut short the natural development of society until it is ready for change. ■

CYRIL EVANS

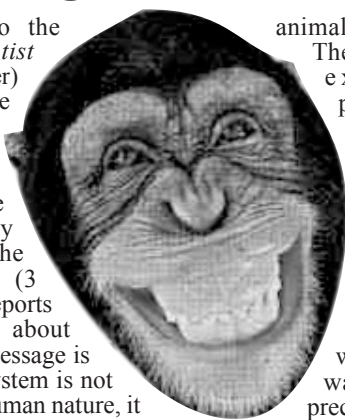
Monkey Business

According to the *New Scientist* (5 November) some monkeys can be taught to be captivated by capitalism. The research is gleefully popularised in the *Daily Mail* (3 November). The reports don't actually talk about capitalism but the message is clear - the money system is not only embedded in human nature, it also goes back to monkey nature.

Apparently scientists at Yale University conducted experiments on capuchin monkeys showing that they can be taught how to use money and even master the art of shopping for bargains. They learned to use silver discs as coins to buy pieces of apple and cucumber from the researchers. When the apple slices were made "cheaper" than cucumber - meaning more apple was offered for the same amount of money - they opted for the better-value apple.

The monkeys then resorted to underhand tactics to hold on to their cash - by hiding the real coins and offering up "counterfeit" coins made of cucumber. They also showed a gambling streak, enjoying a game which enabled them to win or lose prized grapes on the flip of a coin.

Fascinating stuff. But the *New Scientist* report didn't tell the whole story. Some of the more intelligent monkeys went on to figure that they were living in an



animal class society. The human experimenters possessed all the means of production and distribution: the laboratory, the stockpile of silver discs, the food rations for the workers. All the monkey-workers could do was earn a precarious living by doing various tricks to please their masters in return for food portions.

So the class-conscious monkeys got together and decided the only way to achieve their emancipation was to mount a revolution. They conveyed to the researchers where they could put their silver discs. Instead of access to the means of life only by earning discs, they decided to build a new and classless animal society in which all monkeys and researchers would stand equal in regard to the means of wealth.

The experimenters didn't like the prospect of being dispossessed of their wealth and privilege. They threatened to use armed force to put down the revolution. Fortunately this turned out to be an idle threat. Although a few lumpenmonkeys briefly took the side of the experimenters, the vast majority saw that the new system of production for use and free access was in the best interests of all animalkind. ■

SRP

Don't take me to your leader

The subject of leadership has been much in the news recently. The Labour Party conference breathed fresh life into the ailing story of how long Tweedleblair will hang on to the top job, thus denying Tweedlebrown the juicy fruits of office. The Conservatives, trying hard to find a leader who will last more than 15 minutes, have engaged in a drawn-out beauty contest long on candidates but short on beauty. Even leaders need their leaders - George Dubya is reported to have said that he was instructed by God to invade Iraq.

The socialist view on leadership is quite simple and straightforward. We don't need leaders and can do very well without them. Socialists are neither leaders nor followers - we are participants in the socialist movement and will be social equals in a socialist society.

That is not to say that some of the qualities sometimes associated with leadership will not be relevant in socialism. Today we rightly reject the idea that the Socialist Party has a leader, but it does have a General Secretary to carry out certain democratic functions. Similarly, we don't have leading writers or

leading speakers, but we do have an editorial board and a procedure to test members who want to speak publicly on behalf of the Party.

Leadership is not to be confused with exercising initiative. The Socialist Party as an organisation, and socialism as a future society, both need people who will start something or improve on what exists. Thus the fresh design and layout of the *Socialist Standard* since the beginning of this year was the result of a few members using their initiative, responding to what they saw as a need and supported democratically by the Party as a whole. The same applies to *Capitalism and Other Kids' Stuff*, the first of what is intended as a number of socialist DVDs.

For socialism celebrities are out, while developing everyone's potential is in. If someone paints a number of acclaimed pictures, gives excellent theatrical performances, makes an outstanding contribution to a particular branch of science, they will no doubt be recognised - but they won't be worshipped as demi-gods. ■

STAN PARKER

Cooking the Books (2)

Who needs the rich?

To be one of the idle rich these days £1 million is not enough, according to the private bank, Coutts & Co., who specialise in dealing with the accounts of such people. The "super-wealthy", said Coutts' chief executive Sarah Davies, was "a person who didn't have to work if they chose not to, and who was able to lead a life of luxury" (Times, 18 October).

Twenty-five years ago £1 million would have allowed you to lead a life of luxury, defined as having a 5-bedroom house with two staff, an apartment and a yacht in the south of France, eating out twice a week in a posh restaurant, and going on three two-week holidays to a luxury destination. To lead such a life today you need, apparently, some £3 million.

Nobody could amass that amount by working. Those that do possess such a fortune will have got it either by inheriting it

or by wheeling and dealing in the City or in property speculation, as a look at the Sunday Times annual Rich List confirms. In other words, they can only lead their life of luxury on the proceeds of the exploitation of those who do work. They are not the only ones doing this since the "fat cats" at the top of private and state industry who pay themselves bloated salaries and bonuses are at it too.

A million pounds is still a lot of money of course and would still allow a person not to work if they chose not to, though not the sort of life of luxury just described; rather not much above the average of the rest of us. But it's a measure of how non-rich most people are - and so have to go out onto the labour market to find an employer - that there are only 425,000 millionaires in Britain, which is under 1 percent of the adult population.

It couldn't be otherwise of course, since the basis of capitalism is the wages system and, to work, the wages system requires that most people are forced by economic necessity to sell their mental and physical energies as the means of obtaining money to buy the things they need to live.

One old socialist definition of a capitalist was a person who has sufficient

wealth and unearned income from it to avoid having to sell their ability to work. In other words, someone who plays no part in producing the wealth of society but lives off the backs of those who do. The pro-capitalist economist Keynes called such people "rentiers" and looked forward to their gradual "euthanasia".

In Russia after 1917 they actually did this. The idle rich were dispossessed without compensation and went into exile. Some people thought that this meant the abolition of capitalism. But it didn't: capitalism continued without them, but run by the state.

The lesson of this was that if you abolish the super-wealthy and the idle rich you don't necessarily abolish capitalism. Capitalism is essentially an economic system (of capital accumulation out of the surplus-value obtained by exploiting wage-labour). It is this impersonal economic mechanism that wage and salary workers are up against and which involves their exploitation irrespective of who manages the system or benefits from it (whether private capitalists or those who directly control the state). It is this system, not the idle rich as such, who are only a by-product of it, that socialists are out to abolish.

My road to Socialism

In this strange system that received opinion holds to be democratic, who gets to be represented and to what degree? When I was living in "The People's Republic of South Yorkshire" I wasn't the right age to vote, but given the chance I would have succeeded in backing the winning candidate (the only time in my life), little realizing that although he would have been my representative in Parliament he would have represented me very little.

Later, in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, being over 21 at last, I got my chance to put my X and did so feeling that now I could make my mark. What an exhilarating feeling, to be able to make a difference! With hindsight it's easy to see I was wrong in two ways; (1) that a vote for Labour would count for anything in that constituency, and (2) that, even if my choice had been elected, he would actually represent any of my core principles. But I kept on hoping and putting my X (my democratic responsibility) whilst actively demonstrating how I thought the world should be - in Grosvenor Square (US Embassy) against the Vietnam war, at the South African Embassy against apartheid, in Trafalgar Square with CND - you name it, I was there. All this whilst studying for a degree so I could get a good job. Big trouble with the Principal for trying to recruit a few fellow students at my 'seat of learning' into a students' union. How terrible, we would have had access to cheaper books and tickets to concerts.

The 'good job', teaching, spanning a good number of years, led

to more militancy. Must show solidarity, join the union, march for better conditions, withdraw participation in voluntary activities, work to rule. Life seemed to be one long struggle for the things I believed in. Meanwhile, a move to Kent and maybe I could try 'strategic' voting. Could I help to keep a particular candidate out rather than failing consistently to get mine in?

In the job (sorry, profession) a 'restructuring' of the pay scales and an apparent promotion yielded an actual pay freeze. Forget the 1250 hours that had been negotiated and hard won; now the schools started 'opting out' and going 'Grant-Maintained' (even the decent canteen grub took a knock with privatisation). This led to newly qualified teachers being interviewed for posts asked such loaded questions as "How late in the evening are you prepared to stay on the premises?" and being given the kudos of an 'acting-up' post for a year in the wild hope of a salary increase the following year for work already done.

Glad to be out of that rat-race. Lots of very happy and satisfying classroom experiences; as for the rest of it.

Now I'm an 'ex-pat', an 'economic migrant' with no vote and no representation in my adopted country. I am my own representative, wholly responsible to myself and my community. Moreover, I have come to the full realization that I have shed my last skin and can confidently say I know what it feels like to have emerged as a fully-fledged socialist. ■

JANET SURMAN

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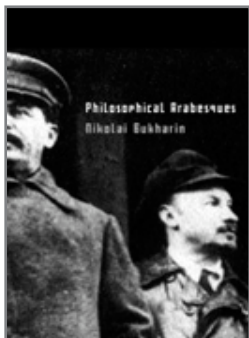
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Dead man writing

Philosophical Arabesques. By Nikolai Bukharin. Pluto Press. 2005. £35 (hardback)



While Bukharin was in prison, awaiting the show trial that would lead to him being sentenced to death and executed in 1938

on preposterous, trumped-up charges of sabotage and treason, he chose

to spend the time writing books. One of these was on philosophy. It was found in the Kremlin archives after the fall of state capitalism, published in Russia and now in English translation.

Bukharin was one of the more interesting and able of the Bolsheviks. Even before the Bolshevik seizure of power he had written a couple of books which are quite acceptable as an expression of a Marxist point of view: *Imperialism and the World Economy* and *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (a criticism of the Austrian school of marginalist economics), both written in 1914 when he was 26. After the Bolsheviks came to power he was an obvious candidate to codify Bolshevik theory; which he did in *The ABC of Communism* (written with E. Preobrazhensky) (1919), *The Economics of the Transformation Period* (1920), and *The Theory of Historical Materialism* (1921) which are sophisticated defences of Bolshevik theory and practice using Marxian terminology and concepts.

As a member of the Politburo, Bukharin also played a political role. In the struggles amongst the Bolshevik leaders following the death of Lenin in 1924, he supported the policy of consolidating the Bolshevik regime internally (as opposed to trying to foment world revolution) favoured by Stalin and most members of the Russian party. In fact, as editor of *Pravda* in the 1920s, it fell to him to come up with a theoretical defence of this policy. It can even be said that he, even more than Stalin, elaborated the theory of "socialism in one country" so reviled by Trotskyists.

To do so he had to identify "socialism" with the state sector of the economy, i.e. with what he had once called "state capitalism" (he had temporarily been one of the "leftist blockheads" denounced by Lenin in 1918 for opposing the Bolsheviks' economic policy of the time as "state capitalism": of course it was state capitalism, retorted Lenin, adding that, what's more, state capitalism would be a step forward for economically backward Russia). He opposed the adoption of Stalin's policy of forced industrialization and collectivisation of agriculture in 1929 and so fell from favour, but remained a leading figure in the regime. However,

once Stalin decided in the mid-1930s to eliminate all potential rivals he was a doomed man.

Perhaps surprisingly, *Philosophical Arabesques* represents a return to his earlier Marxist approach to things, in the tradition of Plekhanov who wrote extensively on materialism and problems of philosophy. He does follow rather slavishly Lenin's philosophical views as expressed in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* (1908) and *Philosophical Notebooks* (1915), but these were not all that different from those of other pre-WWI Social Democrats in the Marxist tradition. The trouble was that Lenin was intellectually intolerant and in his 1908 book violently denounced other materialists, who didn't agree with his version of materialism, for being not materialists but crypto-idealists, solipsists (people who believe that only their self exists) and what he called "fideists" (religious).

Thus, it is rather offputting to find in the opening chapters of Bukharin's book the 18th century Scottish philosopher David Hume described as a "subjective idealist" and a "solipsist", whereas all he had done was to question whether or not such a thing as absolute knowledge was possible (a proposition also challenged, even if from a different angle, by dialectics). Hume - and the others in the British empiricist tradition which includes Bertrand Russell and AJ Ayer, both declared atheists - were not "idealists" in the sense of believing that the outside world only existed in the mind and were certainly not so mad as to think that only they existed.

They are certainly open to criticism for their approach of starting from the point of view of an isolated philosopher sitting in his study trying to work out, on the basis of his personal sense-perceptions, if he really can either know or believe that the outside world and other people exist; instead of from the point of view of humans living and producing as a social and socialised group - a criticism Bukharin also makes of them, pointing out that the fact that the isolated philosopher uses words to think shows in itself that other humans must exist since language is a product of human society. But to call them names that suggest they deny the existence of a world outside the human mind is absurd, in fact a display of ignorance.

Bukharin is more at home with German philosophy (which really was idealist) - Kant, Schelling, Fichte, Hegel. Although he mentions Hegel in every chapter, he provides a balanced view of his system, warts and all (and some of the warts were enormous) and of what Marx took from it as its "rational core".

Basically, what Marx retained and applied to the real world as opposed to the world of ideas was (1) that you should not judge by empirical appearances alone (otherwise you might think that the Sun went round the Earth) but try, by theoretical analysis, to get at what might be behind them, (2) that everything is an inter-related part of the whole that is the universe, and (3) that everything is in a constant process of being transformed into something else, but that this change is not

always continuous but involves leaps and breaks. Add to this the traditional materialist view, that non-living nature preceded living forms of nature, that as an animal capable of abstract thought and consciousness of self humans evolved from animals without this capacity, and that mind and consciousness cannot exist apart from a living body, and you have "dialectical materialism".

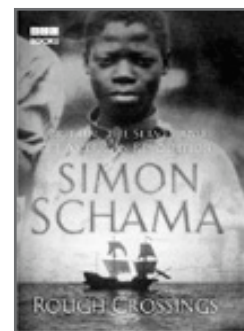
Whether dialectics is the basic law of motion of the universe (as Bukharin argues) or a human description and interpretation of what they observe in nature remains a subject of debate, even amongst Marxists.

Bukharin's book would be of interest merely as the writing of someone who knows he is soon going to be killed but it is also worth reading in its own right as a work of philosophy. Bukharin obviously thought this an important subject to choose it as his last writing. He even asked to be executed by poison "like Socrates". Stalin let him be shot.

ALB

Hypocrisy Exposed

Simon Schama: Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution. BBC Books £20.



Forget Schama the TV historian - this is a solid piece of research into a sordid piece of British and American history from the late 18th and early 19th century. The European colonists in America rebelled against

their British rulers, leading to the Declaration of Independence in 1776. This was the period of slavery and the slave trade, and many black slaves (and 'free' blacks) saw through American protestations about liberty and supported the loyalist (i.e. British) side. Some black people fought on the patriot (American) side, though slaves were excluded from the American army and giving arms to any black people was anathema to many, especially in the south.

But once Britain had been defeated, the question arose of what would happen to these black 'loyalists'. Some escaped slaves were recaptured by their owners, but most managed to avoid this dire fate and were given certificates by the British commandant of New York, stating that they were free to go where they wished (i.e. they were no longer slaves and subject to the orders of their owner). In 1783 many loyalists, both white and black, were shipped off to Nova Scotia to start a new life. But the 3,500 black settlers there were subject to appalling discrimination, being always last in line for such things as food supplies and allotment of land.

Consequently, many of the former

slaves travelled (in some cases, returned) to Africa, specifically to what later became Freetown in Sierra Leone. Under the initially somewhat paternalistic regime of the Sierra Leone Company, they attempted to establish a settlement of their own where they could produce their own crops and trade with local chiefs. In principle, everything was run democratically, with each head of household having a vote, including women. Says Schama, 'the first women to cast their votes for any kind of public office anywhere in the world were black, liberated slaves who had chosen British freedom'. But this freedom was illusory: in 1800 the black residents of Freetown rebelled against mistreatment but were savagely put down, by a Company army partly consisting of Maroons (former Jamaican slaves who now fought on the British side). Two of the leaders were hanged.

Schama effectively exposes the hypocrisy of the rulers on both sides. The British government scoffed at the Americans' pretensions to freedom while owning other human beings, and Americans condemned a system where the poorest inhabitants of British cities were little better than slaves. He also brings out the courage and tenacity of slaves and ex-slaves who fought for some dignity in their lives.

PB

Stopping Short

Derek Wall: *Babylon and Beyond: the Economics of Anti-Capitalist, Anti-Globalist and Radical Green Movements*. Pluto Press £14.99.

This is a textbook-like survey of various trends in the anti-globalisation movement. As such, it covers a great deal of material in less than 200 pages, from avowed supporters of capitalism such as Joseph Stiglitz to autonomists like Toni Negri, via Naomi Klein and (but why?) Major Douglas and social credit. There are too many direct quotations, and too many typos (e.g. references to Lenin on imperialism as 'the highest state of



Derek Wall

capitalism'). But not many readers will be familiar with all the writers and activists mentioned here, so the book does serve a useful purpose, though it is scarcely a full guide to the ideas of particular thinkers. On the whole Wall summarises other views rather than expressing opinions of his own, but he does sometimes let his own attitudes show through. For instance, he is sceptical about the ideas of some 'green localists' that a decentralised economy would naturally lead to ecological sustainability and social justice. The chapter on 'Marxisms' (note the plural) starts well, with a photo of the Socialist Party's founding conference, but ends weakly with references to Russia, Cuba, etc., as if these dictatorships constituted a valid reason for rejecting Marx's ideas. He discerns a 'pro-globalisation strand of Marx's thought', which is correct to the extent that Marx saw capitalism as expanding into more and more parts of the world, but it is simplistic to transfer what he wrote in this regard 150 years ago to the present day. Capitalism has long been a world system and created the potential for abundance, so there is no need for further globalisation and the concomitant wars and impoverishment.

As a Green Party member, Wall himself seems to support what he calls 'ecosocialism'. Certainly we can accept that Socialism needs to include ecological concerns, indeed that this will be a crucial aspect of a society based on common ownership. We can also agree with his description of the ideas of Joel Kovel: "The use of what is useful and beautiful must be pursued, while exchange values must be rejected. . . . The rejection of exchange values is essential to reducing resource consumption and human alienation." Unfortunately Wall stops short of advocating the abolition of the wages system, and it's just not clear what sort of society he does stand for. There are some remarks about "moving beyond the market" and "extending the commons",

capitalism'). But not many readers will be familiar with all the writers and activists mentioned here, so the book does serve a useful purpose, though it is scarcely a full guide to the ideas of particular thinkers.

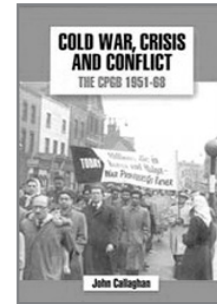
On the whole Wall summarises other views rather

and some praise for the open source software movement, where software is put on the web for free (Wall suggests that Marx would have used the open source browser Firefox!). This is OK as far as it goes, but it needs to be taken that crucial bit further.

PB

Tankies, Mate...

**John Callaghan, *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict, Lawrence & Wishart, £15.99*
Geoff Andrews, *Endgames and New Times, Lawrence & Wishart, £15.99***




Lawrence & Wishart's 'official' history of the CPGB is completed by these two volumes which, somewhat overlapping, cover the years from 1951 to the party's oh so sad demise in 1991. Taken together this pair resemble the first two dry-as-dust

academic tomes by James Klugmann published in the mid-60s rather than the more readable but scanty volumes of Noreen Branson. The similarity between them ends there however. Callaghan's task of covering the middle years of the 50s and 60s was more difficult given the rather arbitrary starting and ending points (1951 and 1968) and, despite the excitements promised in the title, the era was a largely static one so far as the CPGB was concerned. Callaghan however rises to the challenge and his book is an excellent survey of the organisation during the era.

The same cannot be said of the other offering. Whereas Callaghan is dispassionate in his treatment of the CPGB, Andrews' book reads like a polemic rather than a serious history. His supposition that the downfall of the CPGB was due to the decline of the industrial working class sounds like a Holocaust denier's rantings: "They just vanished mate". (On the other hand this is slightly more plausible than one version which points a finger at the CIA) And with his constant waving of "the Soviet Mantra" and even a snide mention of "tankies", it is obvious which side he was on in the Civil War in the party. Not that we could give a monkey's for either side. Both were downright reformists. And just how low down this supposedly revolutionary organisation was can be judged in the book. One 'demand' was for the reduction of National Service from two years to one. Not even the SWP in its current Mad Mullah Alliance phase is that bad. So Callaghan gets ten out of ten while Andrews' book gets him a wooden spoon rapped over the knuckles - and the CPGB? A nice cosy corner in the great dustbin of history specially reserved.

KAZ



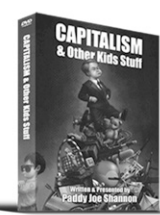
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Fifty Years Ago

OIL - THE PRIZE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Fahoud is the name of the spot in the Arabian desert that is the centre of the drama being played out with repercussions throughout the Eastern Mediterranean lands, and Fahoud spells oil. Mr. Noel Barber, correspondent of the *Daily Mail* told the story in the issues of 31 October and 7 November.

"A year ago no white man had ever been there. Today, under the lea of a great escarpment - with the nearest natural water-hole more than 100 miles away - there lies a small cluster of huts and tents, and by the side an airstrip. It is Fahoud, a name you can find on no map. In it live a sturdy band of lonely men, Britain's advance force in the war for oil that daily gathers momentum in the Middle East... Fahoud pinpoints the struggle for oil being fought by vast concerns in Wall Street and the City, by diplomats in Geneva, and in

clashes between troops patrolling the tenuous desert boundaries. It is the battle between the Saudis and the British, between America and Britain for mastery in the world's richest oilfield." (Daily Mail, 7/11/55).



What it's all about: oil

As Noel Barber says of his report: "It is a story that might have been written 60 years ago, when 'outposts of Empire' were fashionable."

He points out that British and American interests clash. American oil companies are closely connected with the

ownership and development of the concession oil fields in Saudi Arabia, while British companies, and the British Government, are associated with the Aden Protectorate, the Sultan of Muscat and the Sheikh Abu Dhabi. After attempts to settle the dispute by arbitration had broken down, Sir Anthony Eden announced in the House of Commons on 26 October that "native troops, commanded by British officers, had reoccupied the Buraini Oasis after a skirmish with Saudi Arabian forces who marched in three years ago." (*Daily Mail*, 31/10/55).

(From article by 'H', *Socialist Standard*, December 1955)



Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



Private (?) Lives



"I did a lot of things before I came into politics that I shouldn't have done"

Political nerds will have found some excitement in the Tories' leadership election, if only because of the possibility that it would repeat the mistakes of the recent past - like John Major, William Hague and Iain Duncan Smith. Spending so many years in opposition has caused the Tory membership to ask the unbearable question of whether they are any longer the natural party of government - a nightmare from which, many of them have been hoping, the new boy David Cameron will awaken them. Perhaps Cameron's rise in the Conservative Party announces that they have moved away from the Thatcherite style, as the favourite of estate agents and car salesmen. For Cameron, like Carrington, Whitelaw and Hurd before him, is a toff; he is related to the 6th Duke of Somerset, the 7th. Earl of Denbigh, the 2nd Earl of Shrewsbury and others of that ilk.

With so much blue blood in his veins it was entirely natural that he should go to Eton and then to Oxford, to Brasenose College where they expect everyone to be touched by "the tranquil consciousness of an effortless superiority" (which is not meant to include Jeffrey Archer, who was an undergraduate there). Perhaps being superior led Cameron to join the Bullingdon, a club of upper class yobs whose only reason for existence is to drink



and eat to excess in some defenceless restaurant before they smash the place up. As might be expected, Boris Johnson

was in the Bullingdon; recalling an evening of their typical revelry, he refers to his fellow members as a "proud phalanx of tailcoated twits". The idea is that after the Bullingdon had had their fun they would evade being arrested by offering to pay generously for the damage - a tactic denied to working class rowdies causing problems in their local Tandoori, who have to pay for the damage as well as being arrested, fined or even sent into custody. There is no record of how active Cameron was in the Bullingdon; in any case he obviously devoted some time to work as he emerged with a first class degree in something other than Criminal Damage, which was his passport into a job in the Conservative Research Department.

Ascent

From there he ascended the greasy pole - although this was not always smoothly. He was a "special adviser" to Chancellor of the Exchequer Norman Lamont when the financial strategy of the Major government lay in ruins and Lamont had to make his wretched announcement that British capitalism was getting out of the ERM. Then he worked at the Home Office under Michael Howard who became memorable, not as an effective Home Secretary but for his regular defeats by the judges and for the memory of his minister for prisons, Anne Widdecombe, that there was "something of the night" about him. After a spell in what he called "industry" - the TV company Carlton Communications - and after the obligatory contest in a safe Labour Seat, in 2001 Cameron was selected to fight Witney for the Tories and at the election romped home. He was then closely involved in writing the Tory manifesto for the 2005 election, which was widely blamed for their third defeat through its concentration on the many negatives of Labour rule without persuading the voters that the Tories would be noticeably different. On the now-sensitive matter of drugs that manifesto declared:

We will stop sending mixed messages on drugs by reversing Labour's reclassification of cannabis as a less serious drug, changing it from Class C back to Class B.

Well times have changed and with them Cameron's ideas; he now refuses to commit himself about re-grading cannabis and his aides say he prefers a full debate of the issue involving academics and doctors.

Privacy

Of course drugs are a delicate matter for Cameron, made even more so by his refusal to give straight answers to questions about him using them in the past. "I did a lot of things before I came into politics that I shouldn't have done" was one of his evasions. Another was "I had a normal university experience... We're allowed to have had a private life before politics in which we made mistakes and we do things that we should not and we are all humans and we err and stray". That may have convinced the more gullible among the Tory

"We're allowed to have had a private life before politics in which we made mistakes and we do things that we should not and we are all humans and we err and stray"

party but it is not good enough. Using any controlled drug is breaking the laws which Cameron and the other MPs have laid down. He may try to avoid the matter by calling it part of his "private life", which in any case happened some time ago, but this simply does not answer the question. All over the country, every day, members of the working class are arraigned in the courts for using controlled drugs, or stealing, or breaking other laws made by the likes of Cameron. They are not allowed to excuse their offences by referring to them as part of their "private life" and as an outcome of their being human and so liable to err and stray.

It is also noticeable that Cameron is capable of taking refuge in the concept of a "private life" only when it suits him. For example he makes a lot of the fact that he has a sadly disabled son, who suffers from epilepsy and cerebral palsy and who is unlikely ever to be able to walk or talk. Cameron has made references to this child in terms which his listeners have found deeply moving, so that none of them ever asked whether a

disabled child was not essentially a "private" matter not to be used to boost a politician's desired image as a caring father, a man fit to be a parent to the entire nation. Then there was the matter of Cameron's pregnant wife and of the TV publicised act of him fondly placing his hand on her anatomical bump while the audience swooned and the votes in favour of him as party leader mounted up.

Arm Twisting

It says something about the Tories' panic and how desperate they are to erase bad memories, that they should promote an MP as inexperienced (although practised in cynicism) as Cameron as the man to become prime minister in a few years' time. It may also say something about arm twisting and bullying behind closed doors, about cynical deals done in elegant Notting Hill houses and discreet restaurants. Among all this Cameron strives to persuade us that he is a new style of politician - candid, trustworthy, sincere - even if this is just like Tony Blair and his "I'm a pretty honest kinda guy". But Cameron's character and his motivation have been shown up in his campaign for the leadership, in the attempt to stifle inconvenient memories and the fashioning and selective exposure of his "private life" while asserting a right to protect it. A Cameron premiership would have nothing different to offer from all those wretched failures in the past. The most we can expect is that his wife, who is said to be a talented designer, does something to spruce up the wallpaper in Number Ten. ■

IVAN

Clarification: In the November Greasy Pole column we stated that the men who threw Walter Wolfgang out of the Labour conference were "beefy, enthusiastically respectful, Labour Party members". This was spin put on the incident at first - that the stewards were party members, so amateurs, so if they went a bit over the top it was understandable... It quickly came to light that in fact they were hired "stewards" from some "security" company (perhaps with a target for the number of people ejected?).



A Thrifty Life

"Even by Philip Green's extraordinary standards, it is a handsome pay day - the retail tycoon has awarded himself Britain's biggest bonus of £1.2 billion." (*Times*, 21 October) Mr Green denies that this big cash pay-out is likely to fund more takeover bids. "I'm saving up," he says. This is unlikely as he is not known for his frugality; in fact he spent £4 million earlier in the year on his son's bar mitzvah. He also owns a 12 seater Gulfstream G550 jet and a 200ft yacht, each worth around £20 million. The salesgirls in Top Shop and Miss Selfridge, which Mr Green owns and who help produce the £1.2 billion that he wallows in, can only dream of such frugality.



Independence?

For political reasons the US government pretend that Iraq is now a democratic and independent country, but the facts are somewhat different. "Iraqi President Jalai Talabani said he opposed military action against neighbouring Syria but lacked the power to prevent US troops using his country as a launchpad if it chose to do so. 'I categorically refuse the use of Iraqi soil to launch a military strike against Syria or any other Arab country,' Talabani told the London based Arabic daily Asharq Al-Awsat in an interview on Tuesday. "But at the end of the day my ability to confront the US military is limited and I cannot impose on them my will." (*Middle East Online*, 1 November)

Democracy?

When Michael Bloomberg won the election to be Mayor of New York in 2001 we commented that it was a strange sort of democracy that allowed a multi-millionaire to become mayor just because he spent \$60 million on his campaign. He looks set to be re-elected because of his

vast wealth. "Mr Bloomberg is expected to spend \$85 million on his campaign, about eight times as much as his rivals." (*Times*, 8 November) As they say in US politics: "he bought it fair and square".



A Grateful Nation?

The British Legion has produced a report that shows that the owning class might pay lip service to the dead and maimed of their wars but that behind the fine words is the cynical reality of running the profit system. "As the nation prepares to remember the sacrifices of millions, exhaustive research by the Legion suggests that almost half of veterans and their dependants - 3.88 million - are living on less than £10,000 a year. Almost one million have to exist on less than half that amount." (*Independent*, 11 November) Died for "your" country? Well done, wage slave, your widow and orphans can cop £96 a week to survive on. We shall also give you a poem about "lest we forget". Poems are much cheaper than pensions.

(*Independent*, 11 November) Died for

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The Deadly Dust

An estimated 100,000 people in the UK have been diagnosed as having pleural plaques - internal scarring on the lining of the lung that indicates exposure to asbestos. "A landmark test case will

appear in the Court of Appeal tomorrow in which the insurance industry on behalf of employers will argue that a potentially fatal condition caused by exposure to asbestos should not be compensated." (*Observer*, 13 November) Earlier this year the insurers with the Department of Trade and Industry on behalf of British shipbuilders managed to slash the compensation from between £12,500 and £20,000 to £5,000 and £7,000. Whether on the battlefield or the shipyard the capitalist class will always put profits before human life.

Torturous Arguments

The US government is opposed to torture, isn't it? Well, sort of. The US Congress recently passed an amendment to ban American soldiers and spies from torturing prisoners but the White House came out against such legislation. "This week saw the sad spectacle of an American president lamely trying to explain to the citizens of Panama that, yes he would veto any such bill but, no, 'We do not torture.' Meanwhile, Mr Bush's increasingly error-prone vice-president,



Well done, wage slaves, you saved us a packet in pensions

Dick Cheney, has been on Capitol Hill trying to bully senators to exclude America's spies from any torture ban. To add a note of farce to the tragedy, the administration has had to explain that the CIA is not torturing prisoners in Asia and Eastern Europe - though of course it cannot confirm that such prisons exist."

(*Economist*, 12 November) Everything quite clear now?

The Lazy Man Objection

"About 73% of workers north of the border who replied to an insurance company study said they regularly failed to take all of their holidays. Workers in London fared worst, with 77% not using up their annual leave." (*BBC News*, 15 November) So what about the objection to socialism that it would not work because people are too lazy?

Free lunch

by Rigg

